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President: Mr. Koonjul (Vice-President) ..... (Mauritius)

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04-43004 (E)

In the absence of Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Social and human rights questions

(g) Human rights (E/2004/L.17, E/2004/L.21)

Introduction of draft resolution E/2004/L.17

1. **The President** invited the representative of Cuba to introduce draft resolution E/2004/L.17, entitled "Question of the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of international military operations launched to combat terrorism", submitted under agenda item 14 (g).

2. **Mr. Reyes Santana** (Cuba), introducing the draft resolution, said the protection of human rights had no frontiers. It must respect the principles of objectivity, impartiality and selectivity, and must not be subjected to political considerations. Terrorist acts, methods and practices were grave violations of human rights, and must be combated by all States in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Since the brutal terrorist acts committed on 11 September 2001 in New York, important steps had been taken at the national and international levels to combat the scourge of terrorism. Unfortunately, some of them had impacted negatively on the enjoyment of human rights. Consequently, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights had both adopted resolutions on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the struggle against terrorism. However, the international community had since learned with alarm of numerous documented cases of violations of human rights in the context of international military operations undertaken supposedly to combat terrorism. Many public figures, press organs, United Nations human rights bodies and non-governmental organizations had pressed for such violations to be investigated and stopped. As recently as 25 June 2004, a joint statement on the matter had been issued by the eleventh meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, independent experts and chairpersons of working groups of the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights.

3. The draft resolution before the Council was essential in order to maintain the viability and credibility of the international system for the protection of human rights. It would fill a significant gap in monitoring the violations of human rights which had occurred in the context of international military operations to combat terrorism, and would support and supplement other mandates in the area of human rights. The Council occupied a privileged position in the human rights machinery of the United Nations, and was fully empowered to deal with the issue. The draft was not controversial, nor did it condemn anyone; it insisted on compliance with international law, without discrimination or privilege, and was an attempt to combat impunity. By supporting the draft resolution, the Council could make a historic contribution to the credibility of the international system for the protection of human rights.

4. **Mr. Xie** Bohua (China), speaking on a point of order, said he understood the Council to be dealing also with another draft proposal submitted under agenda item 14 (g), namely, draft decision E/2004/L.21. Apparently, adoption of the latter text would override decision 2004/117 of the Commission on Human Rights, on human rights and human responsibilities. However, his delegation's understanding was that the Council was not required to adopt the latter decision. What was the correct position according to the Council's rules of procedure?

5. **The President** said he would seek the advice of the Office of Legal Affairs on that issue, and would defer consideration of draft resolution E/2004/L.21 until that advice had been received.

6. **Mr. Wood** (United Kingdom), speaking on a point of order, queried the notion of seeking clarification of a draft resolution before it had been introduced. His delegation's understanding, after consulting the Office of Legal Affairs, was that the draft decision, if adopted, would in fact override resolution 2004/117 of the Commission on Human Rights.

7. **Mr. Xie** Bohua (China), speaking on a point of order, said that on 16 July the delegation of the Netherlands, on behalf of the European Union, had given a briefing on draft decision E/2004/L.21. It was in the light of that briefing that he had raised his query.

8. **The President** said that as long as draft decision E/2004/21 had not been introduced, it was difficult to be sure that the procedure he had previously suggested would be valid. He therefore proposed that the draft

decision should be introduced and the necessary legal advice obtained afterwards.

9. **Mr. Xie Bohua** (China) asked whether the first course of action suggested by the President would then be invalid.

10. **The President** confirmed that it would. Without a draft text before the Council, no legal advice could be sought. The representative of China had raised an important issue, but it would be relevant only if the Council had a text before it. Accordingly, draft decision E/2004/L.21 should be introduced now.

11. **Mr. Reyes Santana** (Cuba) took the same view. His delegation had some difficulty with the draft decision, but fully accepted the right of the sponsors to introduce it.

12. **The President** emphasized that a draft resolution did not exist, in a formal sense, until it had been introduced. He invited the observer for the Netherlands to introduce draft resolution E/2004/L.21.

Introduction of draft decision E/2004/L.21

13. **Mr. Hof** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union and of Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Guatemala, Iceland, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States of America, introduced draft decision E/2004/21, entitled "Commission on Human Rights resolution 2004/117 on human rights and human responsibilities". The resolution to which the draft decision referred had been adopted by the Commission after a close vote (26 in favour, 25 against). It requested the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to seek views of Member States on the pre-draft declaration on human social responsibilities annexed to decision 2004/117. That was a procedural initiative which attempted, for the first time, to have a pre-draft declaration adopted by the United Nations. The European Union strongly opposed such a declaration. First, the text aimed to make human rights conditional, seeking to undermine the very foundations of human rights law. Second, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights clearly stated that human rights were universal and inalienable, a principle undermined by the pre-draft declaration. The idea that a State could determine which rights an individual could enjoy in return for the exercise of responsibilities was entirely inconsistent with fundamental concepts of human rights. All persons were entitled to the same fundamental rights, without discrimination of any kind. Finally, the pre-draft declaration had not been mandated by the Commission on Human Rights. In its resolution 2000/63, the Commission had gone no further than to request the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to undertake a study on the issue of human rights and human responsibilities.

14. The European Union did not take issue with the idea that members of any society had responsibilities towards each other and towards society. However, the conditional linkage between responsibilities and human rights could not be allowed to go unchallenged. The matter was so important that the Council must now address it.

15. **The President** said that, in view of the fact that the Council did not normally adopt the decisions of the Commission on Human Rights, he would seek legal advice on the question whether the draft decision could be tabled.

16. *It was so decided.*

Implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B

Introduction of draft resolution E/2004/L.24

17. **Mr. Abdalla** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution E/2004/L.24, entitled "Role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits", submitted under agenda items 6 and 8. In developing an integrated and coordinated follow-up, the focus had been placed on cross-cutting goals and on financial and technical assistance. He emphasized the importance of the draft resolution, in view of the likelihood that the Council would play a major role in the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to be held in 2005.

Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations (A/59/121-E/2004/88, E/2004/47 and A/59/64)

Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian People in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/59/89-E/2004/21)

18. **Ms. Pozdnyakova** (Officer-in-Charge, Decolonization Unit, Department of Political Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General (A/59/64), recalled Council resolution 2003/51 of 24 July 2003 and the request to the Council, in General Assembly resolution 58/104, to continue considering appropriate measures for coordinating the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system in relation to Non-Self-Governing Territories. The information submitted by those agencies and organizations on the matter was contained in document E/2004/47.

19. **Ms. Tallawy** (Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (E/2004/21). The report showed that the leading cause of the social and economic plight of the Palestinian people was and remained the Israeli occupation and stressed that the only realistic hope of bringing an end to violence in the occupied territory and Israel was a just and comprehensive peace settlement that included the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and the remainder of the region.

20. The road map put forward by the Quartet (S/2003/529, annex) had been accepted by both sides, but efforts to implement it remained deeply unsatisfactory. The report focused on Israel's relentless efforts to expand its settlements, its erection of a barrier in the West Bank, its imposition of mobility restrictions and closure policies, its destruction of infrastructure and crops and its demolition of homes.

21. Israel's confiscation and destruction of Palestinian homes and lands had swelled the ranks of the homeless and some 28,000 Palestinian homes remained under threat of demolition. Israeli forces had destroyed 10 per cent of Gaza's arable land, uprooted trees and destroyed wells and agricultural warehouses. Curfews and restrictions on the movement of goods and persons worsened unemployment and poverty, prevented health care, interrupted education and humiliated the Palestinian people, individually and collectively. Since March 2003, the construction of fixed and mobile checkpoints, trenches and blockades had effectively dissected the occupied territory into isolated pockets and had made its economy dependent on the informal sector; agriculture was still practised, but under extremely adverse conditions. Some 47 per cent of households had lost over 50 per cent of their income, while the poverty rate had risen to 63 per cent in 2003 and GDP had fallen to below its 1986 level in an economic recession which, according to the World Bank, was among the worst in modern history.

22. Israel's settlements in the occupied territory remained the primary cause of conflict; it had established over 136 settlements in the West Bank, 17 settlements in the Gaza Strip and 180,000 settlers in occupied East Jerusalem. The land area allotted exclusively to settlements was disproportionate to the number of settlers. Although the Quartet's road map demanded a freeze, settlement growth had increased by 16 per cent under the current Government and accounted for a significant portion of Israel's public investment. That policy had given rise to serious concerns about the possibility of establishing an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State.

23. Despite the changes in the barrier's route during 2004, it was expected to incorporate 16.6 per cent of the West Bank. With the barrier, Israel would annex most of the aquifer system that provided 51 per cent of the West Bank's water resources, forcing many Palestinians to leave their lands. Even before its construction, the Israeli Government had permitted active discrimination in the area of water access; 60 per cent of Palestinian families were dependent on water from tankers and water costs consumed up to 40 per cent of household income during the summer months. Checkpoints and closures sometimes prevented water tankers from reaching villages, leaving them without water for days at a time.

24. Humanitarian assistance alone could not ensure a sustainable life with dignity and rights for Palestinian civilians; many observers had concluded that the

purpose of the occupation was to empty the occupied territory of its people. Suffering and dispossession had reached new heights in 2003 and might cast doubt on the effectiveness of existing unilateral and multilateral efforts to resolve the conflict. Only an end to the occupation would put an end to the social and economic plight of the Palestinian people.

25. **Mr. Aisi** (Papua New Guinea) said that the Special Committee on the situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which he had the honour to chair, dealt with the remaining 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories on the United Nations list. Most of those territories were small islands with populations of between 50 and 200,000 and with a wide range of political, economic and social development levels.

26. He noted with appreciation the Council's coordination of the activities of United Nations specialized agencies and institutions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories; many of them provided invaluable assistance in areas such as sustainable development, legal reforms, trade policy, environmental management, health and education and some of them included those territories as associated members or observers. Participation in the work of international and regional organizations exposed the Territories to the assistance available to them and ensured mutually beneficial cooperation with independent countries.

27. He drew attention to the case of Tokelau as an example of progress towards decolonization and commended the Administering Power, New Zealand, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their efforts to bring that Territory closer to self-determination. In a recent Special Committee seminar held in Madang, Papua New Guinea and hosted by his Government, Tokelau had been used as a case study. The conclusions and recommendations of the seminar devoted a separate chapter to cooperation with the Council with a view to giving the Territories better access to relevant United Nations programmes and projects and formulating specific capacity-building programmes in preparation for the attainment of full self-government.

28. But the role played by the specialized agencies and institutions in the Non-Self-Governing Territories could be further enhanced, and the Special Committee was open to cooperation and consultation with the Council on ways of making assistance to those Territories more focused on their specific needs and helping them achieve visible progress towards decolonization.

29. **Mr. Al-Salaiti** (Qatar) said that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the Syrian Arab Golan continued to deepen the economic and social hardship of the inhabitants. The Israeli army continued to resort to such measures as arbitrary detention, household demolition, severe mobility restriction and closures. Since 2000, the number of Palestinian deaths and injuries, particularly among women and children, had been constantly rising. Moreover, Israel had recently stepped up its policy of extrajudicial killings, in violation of international law and in full disregard of the repeated calls of the Secretary-General for their cessation, failing which the bloodshed and retaliation were likely to escalate.

30. Thousands of Palestinians, including women and children under the age of 12, were still being held in poor conditions in Israeli prisons and detention centres. Unremittingly condemned by Qatar, Israel's brutal aggressions included eviction of the Palestinian people from their land, while the expanding illegal settlement was ultimately expected to take up well over 40 per cent of land in both the West Bank and Gaza alike, with all too imaginable consequences for the Palestinian people. The social and economic repercussions of such occupation practices were set to worsen once construction of the barrier wall was complete; not only would the wall eat up more Palestinian territory, but more egregiously still, it would deny Palestinians access to some of their most fertile land, as well as to jobs and services. With no alternative livelihoods in prospect, many of the Palestinians inhabiting such areas would be forced to leave. Qatar had urged Israel to respect the advisory opinion given on the matter by the International Court of Justice. It had also appealed to the international community to put pressure on Israel to do so by immediately removing the wall and compensating all those Palestinians damaged by its illegal construction.

31. The losses incurred over three years of economic decline affected not only the Palestinian Authority, which was unable to pay wage bills or provide the necessary services, but also signalled disaster for the inhabitants of the occupied territories; in 2003, 63 per cent of their number were living in extreme poverty.

The economic situation was such that humanitarian assistance, which was often obstructed by the Israeli authorities, was not guaranteed to produce any lasting effect on the lives of Palestinians. A more enduring remedy to the current economic and social deprivation would be to end all Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and enable the Palestinian people to realize their legitimate rights, in particular that of self-determination, and establish an independent State on Palestinian soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

32. **Mr. Shrein** (Observer for Palestine) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (E/2004/21) provided compelling testimony to the myriad human rights violations committed by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian civilian population.

33. The Palestinian people's realization of their inalienable rights was a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine and for the development of Palestinian society as a whole; that war-torn economy had lost 15 years of growth. Israel's countless war crimes and its policy of confiscating Palestinian land and of building and expanding illegal settlements and bypass roads in the occupied territory, including East Jerusalem, continued unabated and compounded the volatile situation on the ground.

34. In its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice had concluded that Israel was under a legal obligation to terminate its breaches of international law, cease construction of its wall and dismantle the sections constructed to date. The Wall departed from the Armistice Line of 1949, cut deep into Palestinian territory and involved the confiscation and de facto annexation of land and the destruction of livelihoods.

35. Furthermore, the Israeli military campaign had claimed the lives of over 3,100 innocent Palestinian civilians, including 600 children. Other Israeli breaches of international law and international humanitarian law included collective punishments, exploitation of water resources, demolition of homes, restrictions on the movement of goods and persons, administrative detention and harassment, physical mistreatment and torture of Palestinian detainees and prisoners.

36. The United Nations should continue to monitor that situation closely in an effort effectively to put an end to all illegal Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; compel Israel to respect its obligations; and bring a halt to the Israeli destruction the Palestinian economy and natural resources and of the natural resources in the occupied Syrian Golan. Humanitarian assistance was not sufficient; only when the occupation was lifted would the Palestinian people be able to live a normal life, free from Israeli occupation, subjugation and destruction.

37. **Mr. Sermoneta** (Observer for Israel) said that while Israel acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinian people, the burden of their misery lay at the doorstep of their leadership; moreover, the Israeli people were also suffering the physical, psychological and economic consequences of terrorist attacks. By stopping infiltrations into Israeli territory, the security fence would make it possible to move forward in the peace process and ensure enjoyment of the most basic human right: the right to life.

38. The biased report which the Council had before it made no mention of the damage to Israel's economy; over 25 per cent of its children were living below the poverty line and foreign investment had turned away from the region. But, rather than arguing about the relative suffering of the Israeli and Palestinian people, it would be better to cooperate in order to end that suffering for all. Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan should be welcomed as a step towards a new era of renewal which could be achieved only by combating terror and corruption, not by producing politicized reports replete with distorted facts from dubious or outdated sources.

39. The Palestinian leadership had chosen the path of greed and opportunism; during the past few days, members of the highest echelons had resigned, citing corruption and nepotism. A recent document issued by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade criticized individuals, including wives and children of officials, who were falsely registered as employees of the Palestinian Authority. When even terrorist organizations were calling for more honesty and less corruption, something must be seriously wrong.

40. The report painted an absurdly slanted picture of the situation in the Middle East. It complained about Israel's use of water but failed to acknowledge that the Palestinians refused to cooperate in the treatment of sewage; it mentioned the closing of the Erez crossing into Gaza as a cause of hardship while ignoring the attack by a female terrorist that had prompted that closing; it made no reference to the use of ambulances to smuggle terrorists, weapons and possibly even the body parts of slain Israeli soldiers; and it spoke of Israel's seizure of funds from Palestinian banks without explaining that those funds were being used to fund terrorism.

41. Over 80 per cent of the Palestinian Authority's trade was with Israel; that trade had increased by 16 per cent between 2002 and 2003 but was still far from the level of 2000. Before the current onslaught of terrorism, the Palestinian unemployment rate had decreased by almost 50 per cent and trade and investment had grown exponentially. Clearly, the standard of living of the Palestinian people could be improved only through a total elimination of terror and a dialogue with Israel aimed at ending the conflict. Instead, the report took the view that terrorists were righteous, justice was terrorism and pain was no longer a universal experience.

42. The statement in the Koran that all people were a single nation accorded well with the mandate of the United Nations and with the inner morality felt by all. No one had a monopoly on misery and everyone had a right to economic, physical and spiritual health. The Council should cease to consider reports which were framed in language biased towards one side of the conflict in the Middle East and which exacerbated problems by giving fabrications and distortions a lifetime far in excess of what they deserved.

43. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report further blackened Israel's history and exposed the suffering caused to Palestinian and Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories by Israeli settlement practices and other acts of violence in contravention of United Nations resolutions. The victims of such acts, including children, had increased and Israel had also intensified its policy of extrajudicial killing. Moreover, hundreds of the increasing number of Palestinians under arbitrary arrest and detention were subjected to torture and to inhumane and degrading treatment at the hands of the Israeli security forces, while others had died of neglected health problems. The report also catalogued Israel's destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, as well as the mobility restrictions from which even humanitarian organizations and students were not exempt.

44. In the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, the Israeli occupation forces continued their repression and intimidation of the Arab inhabitants. Blocking the road to peace, they had also stepped up their illegal settlement activities in a bid to alter the demographic composition of all occupied territories and in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, under which settlement was deemed to be a war crime. The barrier now being built on wide areas of Palestinian land clearly revealed Israel's aspirations to strengthen settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, which it aimed to isolate from those territories. It thus hoped to create new facts on the ground and to place obstacles in the way of the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, thus preventing the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian State. It was determined to forge ahead in defiance of the recent advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, according to which the barrier was illegal and should be dismantled. He therefore renewed his appeal to the international community not to let Israel get away with flouting international legitimacy and resolutions of United Nations bodies and also appealed to those States which systematically advocated human rights to take action to counter the tragic economic and social conditions facing the inhabitants of all Israeli occupied territories.

45. **Ms. Tallawy** (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) said that the representative of Israel had always accused the Commission and the Secretariat of bias in its reporting. She pointed out that the information provided covered all people in the region, including Israel, and had been specifically prepared in line with a mandate calling for an analysis of the impact of the Israeli occupation on the socio-economic situation of the Palestinians. That neither meant that Council was required to focus on the suffering of the Israeli people nor that it should concern itself with corruption in the Palestinian Authority. Previous reports had indicated that four projects financed by the European Union or individual Member States in Europe had been destroyed by Israel

and in no way had those reports been based on allegations or been partial.

46. **Mr. Al-Rasheed** (Saudi Arabia) said that the report placed matters in context and accurately reflected the suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of the arbitrary acts and repression carried out by the Israeli authorities.

Introduction of draft resolution E/2004/L.23

47. **Mr. Gala Lopez** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution E/2004/L.23, entitled "Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations", said that the Council's work in facilitating and coordinating the work of the entire spectrum of the United Nations system in the 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories must not be underestimated. As the Council pursued its mandate, under the Charter, to promote progress in economic, social, cultural and educational terms, in observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, those territories would continue to benefit from cooperation with the United Nations and its institutions. As indicated in the draft resolution and the report of the President of the Council on consultations held with the Chairman of the Special Committee on Decolonization, a number of specialized agencies and institutions within the United Nations system included Non-Self-Governing Territories in their projects and programme activities. In that regard, he commended the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organization of East Caribbean States, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Pacific Islands Forum for assisting Non-Self-Governing Territories. Both texts reaffirmed the acknowledgement by United Nations bodies of the legitimate aspiration of people in the Non-Self-Governing Territories to exercise their right to self-determination. The draft resolution requested the specialized agencies and other organizations association with the United Nations as well as the international and regional organizations to speed up progress in terms of the economic and social development of the Territories. The President of the Economic and Social Council was also requested to pursue, with the Chairman of the Special Committee on Decolonization, issues involving implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

Introduction of draft resolution E/2004/L.25

48. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia), introducing draft resolution E/2004/L.25, entitled "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan", said that the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory including East Jerusalem had had a devastating effect on the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people. The economic indicators bore alarming testimony to the increasing percentage of unemployment and poverty levels among the Palestinian population. The report also provided shocking evidence of the repercussions that Israeli settlements and the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to have on the living conditions of the Palestinian people. It also documented the negative effects that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan were having on the people's access to natural resources and social services. He welcomed the advisory opinion rendered in July 2004 by the International Court of Justice and reaffirmed the principle of the permanent sovereignty of peoples under foreign occupation over their natural resources. He urged Member States to encourage private foreign investment in order to alleviate the hardship of the Palestinian people.

49. **Mr. Shrein** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the responsibility for the misery and suffering of the Palestinian people did not lie with their leaders. The prolonged brutal and oppressive Israeli occupation prevented the Palestinian people from achieving their freedom, and if Israelis were also suffering, that was because their Government insisted on colonizing other people's land and refusing to negotiate on the basis of international law and legitimacy. It was clear that his country had been under Israeli occupation for the past 37 years and anti-terrorism should not be used as an excuse to prevent the Palestinian people from achieving their right to self-determination and their freedom. The Israeli Government could end the suffering of both the Israeli and Palestinian people by ending the immoral occupation.

50. **Mr. Sermoneta** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it was easy to blame the stronger party. He was surprised that the Observer for Palestine failed to recognize a few basic facts known by many Member States. Rejection had accompanied Palestinian policy-making from 29 November 1947 to the Camp David talks in 2000. Terrorism had not been born after the so-called occupation. The Charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization had talked about occupation in 1964, even before the 1967 war. In terms of self-determination, the Palestinians were playing a zero-sum game. As long as the dehumanization of wishing one's own death in order to cause someone else's continued, there could be nothing but more violence. Trying to reverse the wheel of history wasted everybody's time and resources and dashed people's hopes. The majority of people in Israel were still interested in a settlement of the dispute, but on the Palestinian side all he saw was total disregard, disrespect and a lack of consideration.

51. **Mr. Shrein** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Palestine was interested in resolving the issue based on international law and legitimacy. What was required of Israel was to end the occupation of Palestinian lands captured in 1967. It was not a debate about Israel's right to exist, but about Palestinians trying to have that right next to Israel in their own state. The prolonged, immoral Israeli occupation was having a negative impact on both parties, corrupting the Israeli side. For the benefit of the people of the region as a whole, the occupation must be brought to an end as soon as possible based on the two-State solution. In the Israeli government coalition, there were factions that were calling for the transfer of Palestinians altogether from the West Bank and Gaza, which he found to be racist.

Coordination, programme and other questions

(g) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force (E/2004/62)

(h) Tobacco or health (E/2004/55)

52. **Mr. Gerus** (Belarus), commending the work of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force, said that since June 2003 it had done a great deal to meet the needs of Permanent Representatives and observer missions for rapid access to the information databanks of the United Nations, to modernize their information technology and to help delegates to use the Internet for accessing official documentation. He supported the recommendations of the Task Force for regular updating of the site dedicated to missions in New York, and for training in information protection for the Secretariat and for mission staff. He also welcomed the consideration being given to issuing resolutions and decisions of the principal organs of the United Nations on compact disk. The Task Force should continue monitoring and updating the Organization's information systems and ensuring their accessibility to all Member States.

53. The second annual report of the Task Force showed that the past year had been full of heavy responsibilities in a variety of activities. He welcomed its endeavours to fulfil its international mandate to assist the development process, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/295. In advance of the World Summit on the Information Society, it had been preparing the ground for using the fruits of the revolution in information and communications technology to achieve the internationally agreed development goals. It should be an important focus of the Council's work to place information and communications technology at the service of development. For the second year in succession, the Task Force had been collaborating with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics and the "Intel" company to teach members of diplomatic missions the basics of computing and the Internet, a useful exercise which should be continued in 2005.

54. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that information and communication technologies were an indispensable instrument for development. The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force was in a particularly good position to promote development and the elimination of poverty. It was important to pursue the initiatives and projects designed to promote information and communication technologies in key areas such as education, health, human resources development and capacity-building. The Task Force should continue to play an important role in the process leading to the World Summit on the Information Society, in particular the follow-up of the Geneva phase and preparations for the Tunis phase. The Secretary-General's report stressed the need to shift the focus to development rather than remain on information technologies per se and to ensure that

international development objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals became the centre of the global action plan. Triangular cooperation could be an appropriate framework in assuring complementarity between developed and developing countries which had managed to acquire their own information and communication technologies capabilities. He called for the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force to attach particular importance to South-South cooperation.

55. **Mr. Neil** (Jamaica) commended the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force on its work, particularly in building partnerships and contributing to information and communication technologies (ICT) policy and governance. Capacity-building and resource mobilization were the most critical areas of work for the Task Force, but capacity-building should be focused on both human capacity and physical infrastructure.

56. He welcomed the establishment of the digital diaspora networks which drew on the expertise and knowledge of expatriate communities and, in that connection, referred to initiatives taken in the Latin American and Caribbean region. He noted, however, that the special needs and challenges faced by the smallest economies must be taken into account, mainly because of their disadvantaged position, with respect to investment flows and infrastructure development.

57. He looked forward to the proposal for a system-wide strategy to use ICT as a tool in the development programmes of the United Nations system which was scheduled to be submitted to the Secretary-General in 2004, and hoped the content of the proposal would be shared with Member States of the United Nations prior to the negotiation of the triennial comprehensive policy review. The ultimate objective of the work of the Task Force should be to accelerate development through the use of ICT, an objective that could only be achieved if more effort were made to increase access for the poor in remote communities and small- and medium-sized enterprises at low cost.

58. **Ms. Yamamoto** (Japan) said that her delegation appreciated the significant work carried out by the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control; her Government attached great importance to tobacco control as a health issue and recognized the need for international cooperation in public health. In that vein, Japan had accepted the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which was expected to provide a well-balanced basis for negotiations, taking into account the needs of tobacco producers and consumers. The adverse effect of tobacco consumption on health was not in doubt, but the report of the Secretary-General had also shown its impact on a number of areas such as education, environment, economic growth and poverty. The varied aspects of tobacco control required a comprehensive and sector-wide approach. In that context, the Government of Japan fully supported the work of the Task Force in promoting the implementation of effective and comprehensive tobacco strategies.

59. **Ms. Fleming** (World Bank), speaking as a member of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control, said that the members of the Task Force had worked with local and international experts to analyse the link between tobacco and poverty. It had been determined that priority should be placed on the reduction of smoking, deterring young persons from taking up smoking and the protection of vulnerable populations, including women and children, from exposure to smoke.

60. The addictive nature of tobacco entrapped poor smokers and their families in a cycle of economic hardship because of the significant proportion of household income spent on tobacco products. In addition, there was the added risk of income loss and health-care costs which accrued in the case of sickness. Many developing countries had experienced an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases, a clear impact of rising tobacco use.

61. In addition to smokers and their families, new evidence showed that small tobacco farmers also faced increasing risk of poverty, despite the increase in world demand for the tobacco leaf. Unstable world prices, due in part to a saturated world tobacco supply market, environmental problems, lack of technical and financial support for crop diversification, declining soil fertility and green tobacco sickness were some of the threats to tobacco growers.

62. To reduce poverty attributable to tobacco, Governments could help to change the social norms on the acceptability of smoking through public information campaigns on the health and economic aspects of tobacco use. Governments could also help poor smokers to stop or reduce smoking, with a further

thrust to prevent young people from starting. In addition, Governments could deepen their understanding of the difficulties facing tobacco farmers and help them with the adoption of appropriate policies.

63. Tobacco control was indeed a challenging task which could be boosted by a strong global movement. The international community must act immediately to curb and reverse the growth of the smoking epidemic to prevent unnecessary deaths and disease.

64. **Ms. Chenoweth** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supported measures to curtail smoking and, within the context of inter-agency cooperation, particularly the work of the Task Force, FAO had undertaken a project consisting of a number of studies on various aspects of the global tobacco economy. One of the publications emanating from that work attempted to project developments in the tobacco economy for the remainder of the decade and reviewed trends in global patterns of production, consumption and trade since 1970. The second publication provided a closer look at tobacco economies in a few countries and provided a deeper understanding of the economic contribution of tobacco production and the likely impact of tobacco control on producers and exporters.

65. The results of projections indicated that if present policies continued, global production and consumption of tobacco would be expected to grow due to population growth and increasing income levels. By the year 2010, tobacco consumption would amount to some 7.1 million tonnes, a rate of growth that was lower than in the 1990s. Per capita consumption of tobacco in developing countries was expected to continue to rise although it was contracting in the developed countries.

66. An alternative scenario had also been analysed, incorporating assumptions that consumption taxes would be significantly increased and that support for tobacco farming would be reduced. The impact of those measures would be fairly modest: aggregate levels of production and consumption would still not decline, although the average global consumption per capita would be expected to contract slightly. If strong and effective tobacco control measures were to be introduced, to the extent that consumption declined, there would be a significant economic impact on the economies of tobacco-producing countries. The extent of that impact would depend on various factors, particularly the existence of alternative economic opportunities in agriculture or in other sectors and the degree of control measures both within a country and in those of its major trading partners.

67. Many farmers produced tobacco because it was lucrative, and they were unlikely to switch to other crops unless the price of tobacco fell significantly. A shift away from tobacco production to other industries could become necessary in order to minimize economic losses if demand for tobacco were to weaken. Alternative crops could be grown on most lands now under tobacco production and there were other potential sources of employment for tobacco industry workers. Assistance from the international community would be particularly beneficial to countries that were more heavily dependent on tobacco as it would allow the necessary adjustments to be made in an efficient manner.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.